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NORTH VIETNAM

I. The Air War

A. Achievements of Rolling Thunder Program

The aerial bombardment of North Vietnam, now confined to the areas south of the 19th Parallel, continues to place a burden on North Vietnam and her allies for their support of the war. It has disrupted and delayed the movement of men and supplies and has destroyed equipment and facilities.

1. The bombing program has more than ever become an interdiction campaign.
  - a. Since 31 March, air attacks have concentrated on the narrow logistics funnel through which almost all men and supplies destined for South Vietnam must flow.
  - b. Major military, industrial and transportation centers are free from air attack.
  - c. Targets now under attack are fleeting or small targets, widely dispersed and extremely difficult to neutralize or to interdict.
2. The scale of the air effort over North Vietnam has not been significantly reduced.
  - a. During the first half of 1968, 42,330 attack sorties were flown,
  - b. As a comparison 52,280 were flown in the same months of 1967.

- c. During July and August the number of attack sorties was almost 20 percent more than in these months in 1967.
  - d. However, about 101,000 tons of ordnance have been dropped on North Vietnam during the first half of 1968, as much as was delivered in the similar period in 1967.
  - e. Almost three times as many attack sorties by B-52 bombers have been flown against North Vietnam than in the comparable period of 1967.
  - f. Sorties attacking targets south of the 19th Parallel carry maximum ordnance loads because the area is closer to US bases and air-to-air missiles are not needed to counter the minimal MIG threat.
3. The bombing is inflicting heavy damage on North Vietnam's logistics system.
- a. Damage to truck parks, transshipment and storage areas, bridges, and road and rail cuts are well above the results of previous campaigns.
  - b. Effective truck losses during the second quarter of 1968 were 70 percent higher than during the second quarter of 1967 and more than double the first quarter of 1968.

- c. Rail transport on the small segment of the rail network subject to bombing has been interrupted by the large number of interdictions.
- 4. However, countermeasures have kept open the lines of communications.
  - a. A number of bypasses and feeder roads have been constructed.

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- 5. Movements of supplies and of men have continued at high levels.

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B. Reduced Air Losses

A positive aspect of the present air war is the reduced cost to the US in aircraft and personnel lost to enemy action.

1. US plane losses over North Vietnam have been reduced by more than half.
  - a. For the first half of 1968 the combined loss rate for combat and operational losses dropped to 1.3 aircraft per 1,000 sorties compared with 1.9 in 1967 and 3.4 in 1965.
  - b. During the second quarter of 1968, 29 combat losses were sustained compared with 72 losses during the same period in 1967.
  - c. The North Vietnamese lost 3 MIG jet fighters during the second quarter of 1968.

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2. More than half of the personnel downed during this period were rescued, compared with less than a third in preceding periods.
3. However, the threat to US air operations continues and North Vietnam's air defense capabilities are being steadily improved.
  - a. The number of jet-fighters being held in country has increased from 16 at the end of March to almost 50 in early September.
  - b. An airfield at Bai Thuong, south of the 20th Parallel has been made serviceable for use by jet fighters.
  - c. Additional antiaircraft artillery has been moved into the area now being bombed.
  - d. As many as 10 new SAM battalions have been added to the country's missile defense system.
  - e. However, there has been no significant increase in the SAM battalions deployed south of the 19th Parallel.